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SUBJECT: FORMIN AGREES ON NEED FOR PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT FOR IRAQ ELECTIONS

REF: STATE 4932

Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

11. (S) In response to the Ambassador's January 11 delivery of reftel demarche on Iraqi elections, Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa quickly agreed to make public statements in support of the elections. He said that the January 6 Iraq Neighbors conference in Amman did not result in a statement as "clear and forceful" as he would have liked regarding support for the elections. In Amman, he had proposed that the group issue a statement in Baghdad in order to speak directly to the Iraqi people. Jordanian Foreign Minister Al Mulki was ready to do it but Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari was "hesitant" about the idea. Addressing sectarian concerns, Zebari had said that no one group in Iraq had the right to rule another. Shaikh Mohammed complained that there were problems in Bahrain's communication with Iraq's Sunnis; Iraq's Shia have been more active with Bahrain. End Summary.

Speaking Clearly and Forcefully - In Baghdad?

12. (S) Ambassador January 11 delivered reftel demarche on underscoring the importance of Iraqi elections moving forward as scheduled to Foreign Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa. The Ambassador emphasized that public expressions of support for the elections were most important and noted that Egyptian President Mubarak had done so twice in recent days. The Minister replied, "yes, I will do that." He continued that the aims of the January 6 Iraq Neighbors conference in Amman were (1) to ensure that neighboring countries, particularly Syria and Iran, not interfere in Iraq's domestic affairs, and (2) to support the elections "clearly and forcefully;" that is, to urge all Iraqis to participate and all of Iraq's neighbors to support them. He commented that the conference did not accomplish these aims as well as it could have.

13. (S) Shaikh Mohammed said that the only initiatives on the agenda in Amman were from Bahrain - the King's previously proposed invitation for an Iraqi moderates conference in Manama, and Shaikh Mohammed's suggestion that meeting chair Jordanian Foreign Minister Al Mulki issue a public statement of support in Baghdad. Representatives of the UN and Arab League could be present at the announcement. The other ministers agreed it was a good idea but Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari was hesitant, though he did not reject the proposal outright. Shaikh Mohammed reiterated that he is ready to go to Baghdad at any time for this purpose. Such a statement would appeal directly to the Iraqi people, saying that the elections are a unique opportunity and they should take advantage of it.

No One Group Has Right to Rule Others

14. (S) In response to the Ambassador's question, the Foreign Minister said that Zebari was very optimistic about the elections, expecting up to 8 million voters to participate. Regarding Iraq's Sunnis, the Foreign Minister said that Zebari had told the conference that the "minority would not rule the majority and the majority would not rule the minority." He had said the constitutional principle was that no one group had the right to rule others. The Ambassador commented that SCIRI leader Al Hakim had said the right things during his recent visit to Bahrain. Shaikh Mohammed agreed and noted that many Iraqi Shia had come to Bahrain (Hakim's son Amer Abdul Aziz Al Hakim is here now), but Iraq's Sunnis had not done so. He said there were problems in Bahrain's communication with the Sunnis. (Note: IIG President Yawar visited Bahrain for several weeks in November. End Note.) The Ambassador stated that as many Sunnis as possible should participate in the elections so they feel they have a stake in Iraq's future.

15. (S) The Minister stated that this election will have a major impact on the future of the region. The participation of Turkey and Iran in the neighbors meetings is important. He noted that some Arabs feel hesitant about Zebari. They were surprised when he spoke in English at the Sharm meeting rather than in Arabic. Shaikh Mohammed said, "you cannot pull Iraq from the Arab world." The majority of the population - Sunni and Shia - are Arabs, not Kurds, Turks, or Persians. Despite the concerns, Zebari, he said, is a "good, reasonable, down-to-earth" man.

16. (S) Shaikh Mohammed stated that Iran was strong in Basra but other areas of the country are opposed to Iranian interference. There are fears of Iran's expansionist tendencies in Iraq and throughout the region. He commented that the Iranian government should be more concerned with providing good education and clean water to its citizens than about spending billions on the military.

17. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.

MONROE